AN ADAMANT YOUNG MAN Palm Sunday April 11, 1965

When he died, Dag Hammarskjold left an indelible mark on the United Nations, of which he was the secrytary General. He left his mark on histoy also, of which he was a student, and in which he was an enthusiastic participant. But Dag Hammarskjold's immortality may spring not from his mastery of diplomacy nor his historical sensitivity but from a mark of another type, - a book, published posthumously, the title of which is simply Markings. Hammarskjold kept a diary of sorts, a running record of his thoughts and ideas. He let it be known that should his life be worth remebering, it washis wish that these Markings should be associated with him.

I took the title of this sermon from one of the entries, dated sometime in 1951. Let me read part of it to you.

A young man, adamant in his committed life. The one who was nearest to him relates how, on the last evening, he rose from supper, laid aside his garments and washed the feet of his friends and disciples - an adamant young man, alone as he confronted his final destiny.

He has observed their mean little play for his - his! - friendship. He knew that not one of them had the slightest conception of why he had to act the way he must. He knew how frightened and shaken they would all be. And one of them had informed on him, and would probably soon give a signal to the police.

He had assented to a possibility in his being, of which he had had his first inkling when he returned from the desert. If God required anything of him, he would notmdail. Only recently, he thought, had he begun to see more clearly, and to realize that the road of possibility might lead to the cross. He knew, though, that he had to follow it, still uncertain as to whether he was "the one who shall bring it to pass", but certian that the answerc could only be learned by following the road to the end. The end might be a death without significance - as well as being the end of the road of possibiltiy. . .

A young man adamantin his committment, who walks the road of possibiltl to the end, without self pity or demand for sympathy, fulfilling the destiny he has chosen - even sacrificing affection and feldowship when the others are unready to follow him - into a new fellowship. RCK

Of course Hammarskjold is here referring to Jesus Christ, and his statment is an illuminating description of several themes that are present in the account of the Palm Sunday experience. There is the charismatic leader with his loyal following, the humble man for whose friendship they had actually cpmpeted. There was an element of political intrigue: Judas, nusrsing his hopes that Jesus' entry into Jerusalem would coordinate all the dissendnet elements and being about a revolt against Rome, and seeing his self deception, betraying hi into the hands of his enemies. There was the black mail of the High Priests and the religious authorityes, working behind the seenes to set the

stage for his execution. There was the crowd, now for him, now against him, now shouting "Hosanna", now shouting "crucify him". Finally there is a lonely man, beset with doubts and misgivings, making the most important decision of his life.

It is this latter element that caught Hammarskjold's imagination: that is, the difficulty and risk of Jesus' decision to go into the city in the first place. Here he seems to be making Jesus a prototypre for himself and for all men who must make lonely decisions.

This morning I want to pursue that thought: asking what did his decision to enter the city mean to Jesus. What did it mean to Jeruaslem? and Finally, what does it mena to us?

For Jesus the decision to enter Jeruaslem during the Passover involved an inherent risk. The very manner in which he traveled was suggestive and inflammatory. He could have entered the city like any one of the other thousands who were there for the Passover: he could have slipped in unnoticed. But instead, he chose to deliberatly fulfill the ancient prophecy of Zechariah: "Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass." He knew that this gesture would strike a spark of recognition in the heart of every Jew in the city. Some would rejoice, but others would resent it and feel threatened and hostile. He knew that emotions were easily fanned to a flame during the Passover. The city was crowded with Pilgrims come to celebrate their father's deliverance from a hated foreign domination centuries before. And so During the Passover, the ordinary resentment toward the occupying Romans had an unordinary articulateness. He knew that his coming into the city would add fuel to a slowly burning fire. ~~stir up the people and cause some disturbance.~~ He couldn't have helped but know the danger into which he was putting himself. He had moved about freely in Galilea. But now he was coming into the city, the capital of Judaism, to the temple with its chief priests and scribes. to the living breathing center of life, and there in the middle of it all he was acting outt the claim that he was the long promised Redeemer. Certainly he knew that to do this was to go beyond the point of no return: that his confrontation with Jerusalem would mean one of two things - either his overwhelming acceptance, or his death. We are led to beleive that he knew he would die, and that he willingly accepted even this as part of his adamant commitment.

These are real risks - must have played on his mind in the form of doubts —

But the biggest risk of all, the risk that never occurred to me until I read the words of Dag Hammarskjold was that the end might be a ("death without significance".) Did Jesus know that twenty ~~xxxx~~ centuries hence the one unifying symbol of Western civilization would be a cross, his cross? Did he know that millions of men down through the centuries would sing, ("~~Beneath~~ Beneath the cross of Jesus I fain would take my stand?")? The terrible risk in his walking straight towards his death is that he couldn;t have known. His only hope was the twelve, one of whom had made plans to betray him, another of whom would deny him, and the rest of whom would desert him and melt into the crowd. How could he heve known that his would not be a "death without significance"?

This thought caught Dag Hammarskjold's imagination as he went about his duties as ~~Sec~~ Secretary General of the United NAtions. How does a man know? How do we ever know if the small decisions we make will prove to be good decisions? We don't know, and neither did Jesus, but he accepted this very real risk, and went ahead to do what he felt he must do.

What did Palm Sunday mean to Jesus? I want to suggest this morning that it was a day of deep anxiety for him, an experience of foreboding doubt, a day that demanded his greatest courage and conviction.

And what did it meant to Jerusalem? The strange thing is that Jesus' decision to enter the city was the first of a number of decisions that would be made in the space of five days. His decision to enter was the catylist that set off a chain reaction that did not conclude until he was dead. And he started it all himself.

Jerusalem would gladly have avoided any decision about him. The city was truly neutral. The Temple officilas had probably heard of him, and perhaps some of the citie's residnets had ~~seene~~ seen him on trips into Galilea. But by and large, Jerusalem couodn't have cared less: it was simply not a matter of being for him or againt him. The Roman Governor, a man named Pontius Pilate, accurately expressed the feelings of the people when he tried to wash his hands of the whole affair. Jerualsem would gladly have refrained from a decision.

Notice again that Jesus forced the issue. Had he not come: had he just walked in and celebrated the Passover like any other Jew, Jeruaslem would not have had to decide But

by coming, by deciding to come in the way he did, he made a decision absolutley necessary. What did Palm Sunday mean to the city? AT first really very little, but ultimately it meant that an uncomfotable decision had to be made.

What then does Pain Sunday mean to us? In light of what we have said about the day's meaning for Jesus himself and for the city of Jerusalem, what does it mean to us as we remember it and celebrate it 20 centuries later? Certainly the answer ought to be found somewhere in the area of risk-taking and ecision making.

Now, as then, both are extremely difficult. To combiee them, to present a decision that involves a certain degree of risk is to present a situation we naturally try to avoid. In fact, a certain natural reluctance causes a lot of people to avoid making decisions of any kind. The advertising industry knows this and we are subject to a barrage of subtle persuasion: we are easy prey to techniques and pressures geared to make our decisions for us. Big business knows this: corporations give personality tests to discover that rare person who is secure enough to make decisions. The truly great men of American history were those who could except risk and dovbt and move ahead decsisvely. We honor these men: after they're dead: we see how the greatness of a Jefferron, a Lincoln and a Macarthur. In his Pulitzer Prize winning Book, Profiles in Courage, Joh F. Kennedy told the stories of men who were not afraid to make decisions based on their convictions: and nearly all of the personalities portrayed in the book met with public disfavor intheir life times. Not only don't we like to make decisions ourselves, not only do we avoid translating our convictions into actions, we seem to have a particular cultural aversion for those men who do.

Remember "Marty" - inability to decide

Specifically, in our time there is one great moral issue which has singed the conscienc eof men of faith: there is one great issue today abou t which Christians are making decisions and carying out those decisions in cocnrete actions. And for their efforts they are railed upon as agitators: as outsiders involved in an area that is best left

alone: and of course as Communists. - It seems that anyone who advocates social change must be a communists. Why is that these people who go to Alabama ~~make us feel so~~ - - these men and women who risk everything because of their convictions, make us feel so uncomfortable? Is it because their decision forces us to make a decision? Is it because they're Northerners, and white and maybe even Presbyterians, and their decision implicates us because in a very real sens e they represent us?

Our whole culture, a culture that envelopes the church, seems to ~~have~~ want desperately to spearated religion entirely from the decision making center of life, communal and personal. We are aghast and uncomfortable when we encounter those who feel they must live out their convictions: we are hostile toward ~~these~~ those who make decisons based not on the degree of risk involved, but on ~~what~~ hwts they believe is right and necessary. How much easier to wash our hands of the whole nasty busienss! How much more comfortable to stuff our religion into a corner and avoid any real encounter with life and the world. How much beter not to make decisions, especially risky ones.

As we ask the question, (What does Palm Sunday mean to us?), let us not forget that on this day, Jesus Christ made a decision; and when he carried out his decision it earned him the wrath of a lot of respectable, neutral people. No doubt they called him an outside agitator; for this is what he was. He took himself into their city and there he agitated: their, intheir city he made it impossible for them to remain on the easy fence of neutralit

What does Palm Sunday mean to us? It means that we must see a picture of Jesus Christ that is is something other than that of gentle Jesus, ~~Friend~~ Friend of women and children. It means that we must, on this day, realize that at the very heart of thematter is a decision that Jesus Christ forces men to make.

One of the greatest preachewrs of our time, Hary Emerson Fosdick, had the following to say about Jesus: "Human nature being what it is, Christ is disturbing. We Christians commonly interprest him in terms of his ~~lovxis~~

loveleiness; we call him gloriness names: but he himself said he came to cast fire upon the earth. Something incendiary about Jesus starts a conflagration wherever he appears. To our humannature he is upsetting. Why mustr we be haunted by his ideals so far above us? Why must we be made miserable by the necessity of chosing either for him or against him? Would not life be easier if he had not come, so to challenge us with his demands?"

Fosdick goes on then to suggest that the man who has never felt that way about Christ has never eally taken him seriously. That is to say, Until we have truly struggled with his demand, until we have experianced the risk and anxiety of decision, we have never come to grips with the Christian faith.

On this day Jesus Christ forces us to the point of decision. For on this day he acted out his impatience with the periphery of life; on this day he rode right into the city and forced the reluctant citizenry to decide. So he comes to the center of our lives. Where do we find Christ? Not on the periphery, not in thematters that don't really concern us, perhaps not even in the pleasantry of morning worship. Instead we will find his intruding, agitating presence in the things that really matter to us, at the center of our lives where we make our decisions. This is where Christ is present: this is where he demands to be present. This is what Palm Sunday means.

It means one thing further, and with this I conclude. We observed that for Jesus the decison to enter Jerusalem was not an easy one. In Dag Hammarskjold's words, we saw Jesus as an adamant young man who acted out his conviction inspite of intense risk and doubt. For us, no decision is easy, least of all a decsion regarding religion. As a church we have been going through a period that has required quitea few decisions of us- the decision to become a United Presbyterian Congregation: the decisinn to become a National Missions New Church Development Project: the decision to

build a new bhurch; and recently, the decision to sell this building and propertty. | None of these decisons have been easy: together we have struggled with them: - and together we have made them.

xBxxixxzxxzxxsp As a church we have experienced the pain and the joy of making far-reaching decisions.

But in our persoanl lives we have been making decions also. | We have wrestled with matters of faith. | We have heard the claims of Xhristianity Sunday after Sunday, and found ourselves wanting to believe but not being able to believe. | We have felt the war within ourselves: between faith and logic, between mind and heart. | Today as we remeber our Lord's entry into Jerusalem and what that meant to him, let us each one ~~except~~ accept risk and doubt, as he did. | Let us have the courage to believe inspite of doubt; | let us go from this place, remebering the story of this day, with faith that is forged out of decision - faith that expresses itslef in a life time of decisive Christianity. Amen